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Buddhist Meditation and Depth Psychology

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Introduction

Mind is the forerunner of all (evil) conditions.
Mind is their chief, and they are mind-made.
If, with an impure mind, one speaks or acts,
Then suffering follows one
Even as the cart wheel follows the hoof of the ox.

Mind is the forerunner of all (good) conditions.
Mind is their chief, and they are mind-made.
If, with a pure mind, one speaks or acts,
Then happiness follows one
Like a never-departing shadow.

These words, which are the opening lines of the Dhammapada, were spoken by Gotama Buddha 2500 years ago. They illustrate the central theme of Buddhist teaching, the human mind.

Buddhism is probably the least understood of all major religions. Indeed, from an Occidental viewpoint we might well question whether it warrants the title of religion. In the West we are accustomed to thinking of theology in terms of God, revelation, obedience, punishment, and redemption. The themes of creation, worship, judgment, and immortality have been major concerns in the Christian heritage and are

virtually inseparable from our concept of religion. Against such a cultural background Western man views Buddhism and in so doing unconsciously projects his own concepts, values and expectations. Erroneously he perceives ceremonies and bowing as examples of worship or even idolatry.

He may extol its scientific world view or abhor and condemn its "atheism." The Buddha is vaguely equated with God or Jesus, and meditation is suspected of being a hypnotic approach to mysticism or an escape from reality.

However, such erroneous notions of the Dhamma, the teaching of the Buddha, are not entirely the result of Western ignorance and ethnocentrism. Before his demise the Buddha predicted that within a thousand years his doctrine would fall into the hands of men of lesser understanding and would thereby become corrupted and distorted. [1] Such has been the case throughout much, if not most, of the Orient. Ritual has replaced self-discipline, faith has replaced insight, and prayer has replaced understanding.

If the basis of Christianity is God, the basis of Buddhism is mind. From the Buddhist viewpoint, mind or consciousness is the core of our existence. Pleasure and pain, good and evil, time and space, life and death have no meaning to us apart from our awareness of them or thoughts about them. Whether God exists or does not exist, whether existence is primarily spiritual or primarily material, whether we live

for a few decades or live forever—all these matters are, in the Buddhist view, secondary to the one empirical fact of which we do have certainty: the existence of conscious experience as it proceeds through the course of daily living. Therefore Buddhism focuses on the mind; for happiness and sorrow, pleasure and pain are psychological experiences. Even such notions as purpose, value, virtue, goodness, and worth have meaning only as the results of our attitudes and feelings.

Buddhism does not deny the reality of material existence, nor does it ignore the very great effect that the physical world has upon us. On the contrary, it refutes the mind-body dichotomy of the Brahmans and says that mind and body are interdependent. But since the fundamental reality of human existence is the ever-changing sequence of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and perceptions which comprise conscious experience, then, from the viewpoint of early Buddhism, the primary concern of religion must be these very experiences which make up our daily lives. Most significant of these are love and hate, fear and sorrow, pride and passion, struggle and defeat. Conversely, such concepts as vicarious atonement, Cosmic Consciousness, Ultimate Reality, Buddha Nature, and redemption of sins are metaphysical and hypothetical matters of secondary importance to the realities of daily existence.

Therefore, in Buddhism the most significant fact of life is the first noble truth, the inevitable existence of dukkha. Dukkha is a Pali word embracing all types of displeasurable

experience—sorrow, fear, worry, pain, despair, discord, frustration, agitation, irritation, etc. The second noble truth states that the cause of dukkha is desire or craving. In various texts this cause is further explained as being threefold—greed, hatred, and delusion. Again, on other occasions the Buddha divided the cause of suffering into five components—sensual lust, anger, sloth or torpor, agitation or worry, and doubt. On still other occasions he listed ten causes of dukkha—belief that oneself is an unchanging entity; skepticism; belief in salvation through rites, rules and ceremonies; sensual lust; hatred; craving for fine-material existence; craving for immaterial existence; conceit; restlessness; and ignorance. The Third Noble Truth states that dukkha can be overcome, and the Fourth Truth prescribes the means by which this is achieved.

Thus, with the Fourth Noble Truth, Buddhism becomes a technique, a discipline, a way of life designed to free people from sorrow and improve the nature of human existence. This aspect of the Dhamma is called the Noble Eightfold Path, and includes moral teachings, self-discipline, development of wisdom and understanding, and improvement of one's environment on both a personal and social level. These have been dealt with in previous writings and for the sake of brevity will not be repeated here. Suffice it to remind the reader that this essay is concerned with only one aspect of Buddhism, the practice of meditation. The ethical, practical, and logical facets of the Teaching are covered in other publications.

If the cause of suffering is primarily psychological, then it must follow that the cure, also, is psychological. Therefore, we find in Buddhism a series of "mental exercises" or meditations designed to uncover and cure our psychic aberrations.

Mistakenly, Buddhist meditation is frequently confused with yogic meditation, which often includes physical contortions, autohypnosis, quests for occult powers, and an attempted union with God. None of these are concerns or practices of the Eightfold Path. There are in Buddhism no drugs or stimulants, no secret teachings, and no mystical formulae. Buddhist meditation deals exclusively with the everyday phenomena of human consciousness. In the words of the Venerable Nyanaponika Thera, a renowned Buddhist scholar and monk:

In its spirit of self-reliance, Satipaṭṭhāna does not require any elaborate technique or external devices. The daily life is its working material. It has nothing to do with any exotic cults or rites nor does it confer "initiations" or "esoteric knowledge" in any way other than by self-enlightenment.

Using just the conditions of life it finds, Satipaṭṭhāna does not require complete seclusion or monastic life, though in some who undertake the practice, the desire and need for these may grow. [2]

Lest the reader suspect that some peculiarity of the "Western mind" precludes Occidentals from the successful practice of meditation, we should note also the words of

Rear Admiral E.H. Shattock, a British naval officer, who spent three weeks of diligent meditation practice in a Theravada monastery near Rangoon:

Meditation, therefore, is a really practical occupation: it is in no sense necessarily a religious one, though it is usually thought of as such. It is itself basically academic, practical, and profitable. It is, I think, necessary to emphasize this point, because so many only associate meditation with holy or saintly people, and regard it as an advanced form of the pious life… This is not the tale of a conversion, but of an attempt to test the reaction of a well-tried Eastern system on a typical Western mind. [3]

Reading about meditation is like reading about swimming; only by getting into the water does the aspiring swimmer begin to progress. So it is with meditation and Buddhism in general. The Dhamma must be lived, not merely thought. Study and contemplation are valuable tools, but life itself is the training ground.

The following passages are attempts to put into words what must be experienced within oneself. Or in the words of the Dhammapada: “Buddhas only point the way. Each one must work out his own salvation with diligence.” Meditation is a personal experience, a subjective experience, and consequently each of us must tread his or her own path towards the summit of Enlightenment. By words we can instruct and encourage but words are only symbols for reality.>

The Goals of Meditation

Before discussing the techniques of meditation, it is important that we first define its goals. That is, why does one meditate? What does one hope to achieve?

The ultimate goals of meditation are the ultimate goals of Buddhism, i.e., realization of Nibbāna and the abolition of *dukkha* or suffering. Nibbāna, however, is beyond the realm of conceptualization and all other forms of normal human experience. Therefore, we have no certainty that it exists until we ourselves have progressed to realizing it as a direct experience transcending logic and sense perception. Nibbāna can thus be defined as that which is experienced when one has achieved ultimate moral and psychological maturation. Little more can be said.

Therefore the Buddha said relatively little about Nibbāna and instead directed most of his teachings towards two lesser goals which are empirical realities of readily demonstrable worth. These were, first, the increase, enhancement, and cultivation of positive feelings such as love, compassion, equanimity, mental purity, and the happiness found in bringing happiness to others. Secondly, he advocated the relinquishment and renunciation of greed,

hatred, delusion, conceit, agitation, and other negative, unwholesome states.

As we gain in experience and self-understanding, and as we acquire full appreciation for the nature and quality of our own feelings, we find that the positive feelings (love, compassion, etc.) are satisfying, meaningful, and wholesome experiences in and of themselves. That is, they have their own inherent worth and intrinsic value independent of any world view or religious dogma. Conversely, greed, hatred, lust, etc., are agitating, discomforting experiences (i.e., *dukkha*) which when present preclude a full realization of the happiness born of love and equanimity. Thus the realization of positive feelings and relinquishment of negative feelings are the major goals and motivations of meditation.

While Nibbāna and an end of suffering are the primary goals of meditation and the realization of positive feelings is a secondary goal, there are also several tertiary goals which must be achieved before the higher ones can be fully realized. These are non-attachment, insight, and concentration.

Non-attachment is freedom from craving and freedom from infatuation for sensual experience. It is not a state of chronic apathy nor a denial of sense perception existence. Rather it is psychological liberation from our "enslaving passions and our addictions to sensual and emotional pleasures." Thus non-attachment is akin to freedom, equanimity, and

serenity.

Insight is a word with two meanings both of which are sought in Buddhist meditation. In its classical Buddhist usage insight (*vipassanā*) means full *awareness* of the three characteristics of existence, i.e., impermanence, suffering (*dukkha*), and impersonality. Otherwise stated, this means full realization of the fact that all things in the universe are temporary and changing; the human psyche is no exception and thus is not an immortal soul; and as a consequence suffering is always inevitable, for no state of mind, pleasant or unpleasant, can endure forever. The word "awareness" is italicized here to distinguish it from mere conceptual knowledge, which is usually insufficient to have lasting effect upon one's feelings and values.

In its psychiatric usage insight means gaining awareness of those feelings, motives, and values which have previously been unconscious. Repressed feelings of guilt, fear, lust, and hatred may lurk in the hidden recesses of our minds and unconsciously shape our lives until such time as they are brought into awareness. And unless they are brought into awareness, we cannot effectively deal with them. In Buddhism this version of insight is included under the heading of mindfulness and will be discussed later.

Concentration involves the ability to keep one's attention firmly fixed on a given subject for protracted periods of time, thus overcoming the mind's usual discursive habit of flitting from subject to subject. As we shall see,

concentration is one of the earliest goals of Buddhist meditation.>

Preparations

The initial endeavor in Buddhist meditation is to quiet the mind and enhance detachment and objectivity. For only when the mind has stilled its perpetual ruminating and has momentarily abandoned its fascination for sensory experience can it readily become aware of the unconscious feelings and motivations which shape our thoughts, speech, and behavior. Furthermore, only with detached objectivity and its ensuing insights can we readily confront and renounce unwholesome feelings. On the other hand, we do not achieve complete calmness and detachment so long as we harbor unwholesome feelings and unconscious emotional conflicts. Thus the process is reciprocal: the more we quiet the mind, the more we gain insight and relinquishment of undesirable feelings. The more we relinquish such feelings and resolve emotional conflicts, the more we quiet the mind and approach perfect calmness, detachment, and objectivity.

The obscuring of unconscious feelings by preoccupation with thoughts and actions is demonstrated in a variety of neurotic symptoms. Most characteristic are obsessive compulsive reactions; these occur in persons who are desperately trying to repress overpowering impulses of fear,

anger, lust, or guilt. In order to achieve this repression they divert nearly all their attention to some repetitious mental or physical activity, which is conducted in a compulsive, ritualistic manner. If prevented from performing their defensive rituals, they often become acutely anxious and even panic as their unconscious feelings begin to come into awareness. Less severe examples of the same defensive phenomena are seen in persons who are chronically anxious and are continuously focusing their worries on minor concerns of exaggerated importance such as unpaid bills, social commitments, and alleged physical ills. They, too, rarely relax and are forever busy with petty chores.

These neurotic symptoms are strikingly similar to an increasingly common way of life in Western society. Our ever-expanding populations with their accompanying advertising, mass entertainment, socializing, industrialization, and emphasis upon success, sensuality, and popularity have produced an environment in which we are forever bombarded with an increasing number of sensory and emotional stimuli. The opportunities for solitude and introspection have diminished to the point that now solitude is often viewed as either depressing or abnormal. This is not to assert that the majority of our citizens are involved in a frantic endeavor to escape from their inner selves. Such is no doubt the case with many, but there still remains a sizeable percentage of people who are involved in the same frenzy only because they have conformed to the social norm and have been lured into a

habitual fascination for television, jazz, sports, and the countless other forms of readily-available entertainment. Such persons are not necessarily precluded from relative happiness and emotional well-being.

The point to be made, however, is that the conditions of modern living are such as to pose several obstacles to successful meditation. These are threefold: psychological, material, and social. These same obstacles are present to a lesser degree in traditionally Buddhist cultures and must be considered before discussing meditation itself.>

Psychological Obstacles

It is virtually impossible for a busy person with manifold worldly ambitions to suddenly and voluntarily quiet his mind to the point of removing all discursive thoughts. In a matter of minutes, if not seconds, the meditator will find himself either planning, reminiscing, or day-dreaming. Therefore, before one begins meditation, some amount of moral development and self-discipline should be achieved. In the words of one of the Buddha's disciples:

"Those salutary rules of morality proclaimed by the Exalted One, for what purpose, brother Ānanda, has he proclaimed them?"

"Well said, brother Bhadda, well said! Pleasing is your wisdom, pleasing your insight, excellent is your question! Those salutary rules of morality proclaimed by the Exalted One, were proclaimed by him for the sake of cultivating the four foundations of mindfulness (i.e., meditation)." [4]

In every Buddhist country only a minority of devotees undertake regular practice. The decision to meditate rests with each individual. Many wait until their later years when moral development has progressed and family obligations have been fulfilled. On the other hand, meditation facilitates

wisdom and morality and can be of benefit to the layman as well as the monk.

In addition to adjusting one's daily routine and cultivating morality and wisdom, it is often profitable to take a few minutes before each meditation to put one's mind in a receptive condition. This may be done by reflecting upon the goals and advantages of meditation or by reading or reciting some chosen passage of Buddhist literature or other appropriate writing. If drowsy, a brisk walk may freshen one's mind and can also allow one to think over and mentally dispense with matters which might otherwise be distracting. Also, if one has some necessary chores to perform which can be executed quickly and easily, doing these beforehand will reduce their interference with meditation.>

Material Considerations

Much has been written in both ancient and modern literature about the physical and environmental factors conducive to successful meditation. Mostly these are matters of common sense, which each person must determine for himself on the basis of his own individual needs and predispositions. In the *Visuddhimagga* we read:

Food: sweet food suits one, sour food another.

Climate: a cool climate suits one, a warm one another. So when he finds that by using a certain food or by living in a certain climate he is comfortable, or his unconcentrated mind becomes concentrated, or his concentrated mind more so, then that food or that climate is suitable. Any other food or climate is unsuitable.

Postures: Walking suits one; standing or sitting or lying down another. So he should try them, like the abode, for three days each, and that posture is suitable in which his unconcentrated mind becomes concentrated or his concentrated mind more so. Any other should be understood as unsuitable. [5]

Seclusion and isolation from noise are important considerations, especially for beginners. In an urban

environment complete seclusion is rarely possible, but even relative seclusion is of value. How this is achieved must be determined by the practitioner's individual opportunities and circumstances. The time and duration of meditation will also vary with individual situations. Ideally one should choose a time when one's mind is alert. Fifteen to forty-five minutes is recommended for lay beginners, and many persons are of the opinion that it should be at the same time each day, preferably in the early morning. A good night's sleep and moderation in eating are valuable, but one should avoid an excess of fasting and sleep.

The preferred posture in both Asia and the West is the lotus posture or similar positions of sitting on the ground with legs folded. A cushion or other padding is desirable for comfort. These positions furnish maximum physical stability without the need of a back rest or other devices and are especially suitable if one intends to remain alert and motionless for protracted periods of time. However, many Occidentals are unaccustomed to this posture and are thus unable to assume it or can do so only with discomfort. With practice this difficulty is usually overcome; otherwise one can meditate seated on a chair. The eyes either can be closed or resting on some neutral object such as a blank place on the ground or a simple geometric shape at a distance of three or four feet.>

Social Factors

In Burma meditation is discussed with interest and enthusiasm. [6] Men of national fame will take a leave of absence to further their training, and a practitioner is often greeted with the words, "And how are you progressing in your meditation? Have you reached such and such a stage yet?"

The antithesis is true in America, where meditation is poorly understood; in fact usually it is misunderstood. First of all, the relinquishment of worldly pursuits for the sake of spiritual and psychological gain is foreign to the prevailing values of both capitalist and socialist societies. Secondly, Americans often equate meditation with hypnotic trance, mysticism, or the occult. Consequently, the Occidental practitioner may conceal his practice to avoid social ridicule and religious antagonism. This problem is compounded by the existence of various quasi-religious and pseudo-scientific cults which often attract neurotics and social misfits with promises of occult powers, lasting happiness, and physical health. Such organizations often claim "esoteric" meditations and speak favorably (though ignorantly) of Hinduism and Buddhism. Too often Western impressions of Buddhism are gained either through these

sources and their associated literature or through the unfavorable descriptions given by pro-Christian books, magazines, and newspapers.>

Individual Variations

As we shall see, there are a variety of different meditation practices each intended for specific individual need. In traditionally Buddhist countries novices often seek a learned monk or meditation master and ask to be assigned a specific meditation subject. [7] In the Occident this is virtually impossible. Competent meditation masters are few and far between, and those masters who do visit our shores find that linguistic and cultural barriers prevent them from adequately appraising a novice's needs. Thus the Western Buddhist must fend for himself, relying on his own judgment and proceeding sometimes by trial and error. Here, again, we should note the words of the *Visuddhimagga:*

> For when a very skillful archer, who is working to split a hair, actually splits the hair on one occasion, he discerns the modes of the position of his feet, the bow, the bowstring, and the arrow thus: "I split the hair as I stood thus, with the bow thus, the bowstring thus, the arrow thus." From then on he recaptures those same modes and repeats the splitting of the hair without fail. So too the meditator must discern such modes as that of suitable food, etc. thus: "I attained this after eating this food, attending on such

a person, in such a lodging, in this posture, at this time." In this way, when that (absorption) is lost, he will be able to recapture those modes and renew the absorption, or while familiarizing himself with it he will be able to repeat that absorption again and again. [8]

Not only do meditation requirements differ from person to person, they also differ for the same person at different times. In the words of the Buddha:

> "Monks, suppose a man wanted to make a small fire burn up, and he put wet grass on it, put wet cowdung on it, put wet sticks on it, sprinkled it with water, and scattered dust on it, would that man be able to make the small fire burn up?"—"No, venerable sir."—"So too, monks, when the mind is slack, that is not the time to develop the tranquillity enlightenment factor, the concentration enlightenment factor, and the equanimity enlightenment factor. Why is that? Because a slack mind cannot well be roused by those states. When the mind is slack, that is the time to develop the investigation-of-states enlightenment factor, the energy enlightenment factor, and the happiness enlightenment factor. Why is that? Because a slack mind can well be roused by those states.
>
> "Monks, suppose a man wanted to extinguish a great mass of fire, and he put dry grass on it,… and did not

> scatter dust on it, would that man be able to extinguish that great mass of fire?"—"No, venerable sir."—"So too, monks, when the mind is agitated, that is not the time to develop the investigation-of-states enlightenment factor, the energy enlightenment factor, or the happiness enlightenment factor. Why is that? Because an agitated mind cannot well be quieted by those states. When the mind is agitated, that is the time to develop the tranquillity enlightenment factor, the concentration enlightenment factor, and the equanimity enlightenment factor. Why is that? Because an agitated mind can well be quieted by those states." [9]

There is no prescribed duration for the amount of time one should spend in meditation. The popular Western notion of Buddhist monks spending a lifetime with nearly every available moment dedicated to meditative seclusion is not supported by the recorded teachings of the Buddha nor the accounts of the daily activities of the Buddha and his followers. Nor is this the case with Theravada monks today, except during temporary periods of intensive training. As with all other aspects of meditation, the amount of time must be varied according to individual needs and circumstances.

One final point must be made before proceeding to the techniques of meditation. It is simply this: Meditation requires patience, persistence, and effort. For one who

practices less than several hours a day, lasting and notable progress can only be achieved by months, if not years, of endeavor. There are no short cuts or magical formulae. Consequently, the aspiring practitioner should not expect quick results and before starting should decide if he sincerely intends to put forth the necessary time and effort. A decision not to meditate, however, in no way precludes one from progressing towards the same goals of insight, non-attachment, concentration, etc. Their full realization requires formal meditation practice, but relative success may be acquired at a slower pace through cultivation of one's moral and intellectual faculties. [10]

The Techniques of Meditation

The seventh step of the Noble Eightfold Path is termed right mindfulness, also called the four foundations of mindfulness and Satipaṭṭhāna. The three terms are synonymous and encompass not only the most important aspects of Theravada meditation but also one of the most unique and important features of all Buddhism. A full explanation of mindfulness or Satipaṭṭhāna is given in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, which appears twice in the Pali Canon. The Buddha begins the discourse as follows:

> This is the only way, monks, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of suffering and grief, for reaching the right path, for the attainment of Nibbāna, namely the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. [11]

This same message he repeated frequently:

> Those for whom you have sympathy, O monks, those who deem it fit to listen to you—friends and companions, kinsmen and relatives—they should be encouraged, introduced to and established in the four

foundations of mindfulness. [12]

And again:

> There are three taints (*āsava* or cankers), O monks: the taint of sensuality, the taint of desire for renewed existence, and the taint of ignorance. For eliminating these three taints, O monks, the four foundations of mindfulness should be cultivated. [13]

This same emphasis has persisted even to the present era in some sections of the Buddhist world, as described by the Venerable Nyanasatta Thera:

> The great importance of the Discourse on Mindfulness (i.e., the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta) has never been lost to the Buddhists of the Theravada tradition. In Ceylon, even when the knowledge and practice of the Dhamma was at its lowest ebb through centuries of foreign domination, the Sinhala Buddhists never forgot the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Memorizing the Sutta has been an unfailing practice among the Buddhists, and even today in Ceylon there are large numbers who can recite the Sutta from memory. It is a common sight to see on full-moon days devotees who are observing the eight precepts, engaged in community recital of the Sutta. Buddhists are intent on hearing this Discourse even in the last moments of their lives; and at the bed-side of a dying Buddhist

either monks or laymen recite this venerated text. [14]

Thus it seems a paradox that most Western texts on Buddhism merely list right mindfulness as one of the steps of the Eightfold Path and say little more except to redefine it by such terms as “right contemplation” and “right reflection.” The reason is probably twofold. First, Satipaṭṭhāna cannot be as concisely explained as the other seven steps; for it is not a single step but includes instead several distinct meditation exercises. Second, to be properly understood the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta must be examined from a psychological and psychiatric viewpoint. Most scholars of comparative religion are accustomed to approaching their studies from religious, ethical, or philosophical frames of reference, but none of these orientations apply here. If this sutta alone was to be filed on the shelves of a public library, it would most aptly be placed adjacent to the archives of eclectic psychiatry and would have little in common with the classic writings of religion and philosophy. Even psychology would not be an appropriate title, for the sutta is not concerned with any theoretical or conceptual interpretation of the mind. It deals only with the empirical facts of conscious experience and prescribes the techniques for mental development. It is, therefore, not surprising that many Occidentals who have scanned the pages of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta have judged it confusing, meaningless, and sometimes morbid.

In addition to the two occurrences of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta,

condensed versions of the same teaching appear several times in the Sutta Piṭaka.

The four parts of the four foundations of mindfulness are: contemplation of the body, contemplation of feelings, contemplation of mind, and contemplation of mental objects. The body contemplation is itself divided into six parts—breathing, postures, clear comprehension of action, repulsiveness, material elements, and the cemetery meditations

Mindfulness of Breathing

The initial endeavor in Buddhist meditation is to calm and quiet the mind so that it is fully alert but has temporarily diminished the quantity of daydreaming, planning, reminiscing, and all other forms of verbal and visual thinking. This goal can only be approached gradually, and therefore the beginner should start his practice by focusing his attention on some quiet, readily available, rhythmic process. Respiratory movements are ideal for this purpose. Thus the first exercise of the sutta begins:

> Herein, monks, a monk having gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty place, sits down cross-legged, keeps his body erect and his

> mindfulness alert. Just mindful he breathes in and mindful he breathes out. Breathing in a long breath, he knows "I breathe in a long breath"; breathing out a long breath, he knows "I breathe out a long breath"; breathing in a short breath, he knows "I breathe in a short breath"; breathing out a short breath, he knows "I breathe out a short breath." "Conscious of the whole (breath-) body, I shall breathe in," thus he trains himself. "Conscious of the whole (breath-) body, I shall breathe out," thus he trains himself. "Calming the bodily function (of breathing), I shall breathe in," thus he trains himself. "Calming the bodily function (of breathing), I shall breathe out," thus he trains himself. As a skillful turner or his apprentice, making a long turn, knows "I am making a long turn," or making a short turn, knows "I am making a short turn," just so the monk breathing in a long breath, knows "I breathe in a long breath"; breathing out a long breath, he knows "I breathe out a long breath."…

The practitioner endeavors to keep his mind focused only on the act of breathing itself and not to think about breathing as a subject of intellectual contemplation. In other words, one attempts to give full attention to the reality of immediate experience and not become involved in speculations or contemplations *about* reality.

The theory is quite simple but the practice most difficult. In

a typical case, at the beginning of his meditation the novice directs his attention solely to the process of breathing. Then after a few seconds, he inadvertently begins to think, "So far I am doing all right. My mind hasn't strayed from its subject." But at this very moment he has strayed from his subject. For now he is not concentrating but thinking about concentrating. If he does not catch himself (and he probably will not), the stream of consciousness will proceed something as follows: "My mind hasn't strayed from its subject. I'm doing better than yesterday. I wonder why? Maybe it's because I've finished all of my letter writing. I wonder if Marvin will answer the letter I sent him? He hasn't… Oh, Oh! I've gotten off the subject. I'd better get back to it. But I'm not really back; I'm just thinking about it. I wonder how long it will take me…" And so on it goes, day after day, week after week until the practitioner begins to wonder if he is not seeking the impossible. Yet the fact remains that many thousands living today have achieved this degree of concentration. With little short of amazement, the Western novice reads the Venerable Nyanaponika Thera's remarks concerning Burmese Satipaṭṭhāna training: "Three to four hours of continuous mindfulness, i.e., without unnoticed breaks, are regarded as the minimum for a beginner undergoing a course of strict practice." **[15]**

The most widely practiced form of the breathing meditation is focusing attention at the nostrils where one feels the faint pressure of the ebb and flow of the breath. This technique is not mentioned in any of the recorded teachings of the

Buddha or his disciples but has been popular at least since the time of Buddhaghosa in the fifth century A.D. In the words of Buddhaghosa:

This is the simile of the gate-keeper: just as a gate-keeper does not examine people inside and outside the town, asking "Who are you? Where have you come from? Where are you going? What have you got in your hand?"—for those people are not his concern—, but does examine each man as he arrives at the gate, so too, the incoming breaths that have gone inside and the outgoing breaths that have gone outside are not this monk's concern, but they are his concern each time they arrive at the (nostril) gate itself. [16]

And again, in the simile of the saw, the woodcutter's attention is focused only at the point of contact between the saw and the wood:

> As the saw's teeth, so the in-breaths and out-breaths. As the man's mindfulness, established by the saw's teeth where they touch the tree trunk, without his giving attention to the saw's teeth as they approach and recede, though they are not unknown to him as they do so, and so he manifests effort, carries out a task and achieves an effect, so too the bhikkhu sits, having established mindfulness at the nose tip or on the upper lip, without giving attention to the in-breaths and out-breaths as they approach and recede, though they are not unknown to him as they do so, and he manifests effort, carries out a task and

achieves an effect. [17]

Modifications of the breathing meditation can be applied to suit individual requirements. In the early stages of practice many persons find that mentally counting the breaths enhances concentration. In these instances one is advised not to count less than five or more than ten. Upon reaching ten the counting starts over. By going beyond ten, the counting rather than the breathing is likely to become the subject of one's attention:

> Herein, this clansman who is a beginner should fzirst give attention to this meditation subject by counting. And when counting, he should not stop short of five or go beyond ten or make any break in the series. By stopping short of five his thoughts get excited in the cramped space, like a herd of cattle shut in a cramped pen. By going beyond ten his thoughts take the number (rather than the breaths) for their support. [18]

But how long is he to go on counting? Until, without counting, mindfulness remains settled on the in-breaths and out-breaths as its object. For counting is simply a device for settling mindfulness on the in-breaths and out-breaths as object by cutting off the external dissipation of applied thoughts. [19]

In the initial stages of practice one merely observes the

process of breathing without attempting to change its rate or depth. Later, as concentration is achieved, the breathing is gradually and deliberately slowed in order to further quiet the mind. There is, however, no attempt to stop respiration as in certain yogic practices:

When his gross in-breaths and out-breaths have ceased, his consciousness occurs with the sign of the subtle in-breaths and out-breaths as its object. And when that has ceased, it goes on occurring with the successively subtler signs as its object. How? Suppose a man struck a bronze bell with a big iron bar and at once a loud sound arose, his consciousness would occur with the gross sound as its object; then, when the gross sound had ceased, it would occur afterwards with the sign of the subtle sound as its object; and when that had ceased, it would go on occurring with the sign of the successively subtler sound as its object. [20]

It was a Burmese meditation teacher, Venerable U Nārada (Mingun Sayādaw), who in the early part of this century, stressed the application of mindfulness of breathing as a means of cultivating direct awareness. It was he who gave the first strong impetus to the revival of Satipaṭṭhāna meditation in contemporary Burma. He passed away in 1955 at the age of 87 and is said by many to have realized Nibbāna.

A variation of the breathing meditation was developed by another Burmese monk, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw, who was a pupil of the Venerable U Nārada. His technique

involves focusing attention upon the respiratory movements of the abdomen instead of the sensation at the nostrils. This system has become popular in several parts of southern Asia. A revived interest in meditation has developed in that section of the world, especially in Burma, where numerous training centers have been established, and thousands of monks and lay people have received instruction. [21]

During meditation, when the practitioner finds that his mind has strayed from its subject, there should be no attempt to suppress or forcibly remove the extraneous thoughts. Rather he should briefly take mental note of them and objectively label them with some appropriate term. This may be done by thinking to himself "planning," "remembering," "imagining," etc., as the case may be. Then he should return to his original meditation subject. However, if after several tries the unwanted thoughts persist, he should temporarily take the thoughts themselves as the meditation subject. In so doing their intensity will diminish, and he can then return to his original subject. This same technique can be used for distracting noises. It can also be used for feelings of anger or frustration, which may develop as the result of unwanted thoughts or distractions. In these instances the meditator should think to himself "noise," or "irritation." [22]

As the mind becomes quiet and verbal thinking begins to diminish, other stimuli come into awareness. Among these are sensations, such as itches and minor pains, which are

always present but go unnoticed because attention is directed elsewhere. The same may occur with emotions such as worry or fear, and these we shall discuss in detail later. Pictures or visual scenes may arise and are often so vivid as to be termed visions or hallucinations. They often have the appearance of dreams or distant memories and differ from thoughts in that the meditator usually finds himself a passive spectator not knowing when such scenes will arise or what forms they will take. The meditator should first attempt to ignore these sensations, feelings, and pictures. This failing, he should label them “itching,” “fear,” “picture,” etc., and lastly make them his meditation subject until they diminish. [23]

To be successful, meditation should not be an unpleasant experience. Strain and tension should be minimized. Therefore, if the practitioner finds himself becoming tense, irritable, or fatigued during meditation, he may wish to terminate the practice until he acquires a better state of mind.>

Mindfulness of Postures and of Actions

Following mindfulness of breathing, the next exercise prescribed in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta is the development of the same clear awareness towards one's daily actions. Thus the Buddha continues:

And further, monks, a monk knows when he is going "I am going"; he knows when he is standing "I am standing"; he knows when he is sitting "I am sitting"; he knows when he is lying down "I am lying down"; or just as his body is disposed so he knows it.

And further, monks, a monk, in going forward and back, applies clear comprehension; in looking straight on and looking away, he applies clear comprehension; in bending and in stretching, he applies clear comprehension; in wearing robes and carrying the bowl, he applies clear comprehension; in eating, drinking, chewing and savoring, he applies clear comprehension; in attending to the calls of nature, he applies clear comprehension; in walking, in standing, in sitting, in falling asleep, in walking, in speaking and in keeping silence, he applies clear comprehension.

Here we note a similarity between early Buddhism and Zen. Or as the Zen master would say: “In walking, just walk. In sitting, just sit. Above all, don’t wobble.”

Usually while dressing, eating, working, etc., we act on habit and give little attention to our physical actions. Our minds are preoccupied with a variety of other concerns. In Satipaṭṭhāna, however, the practitioner devotes himself entirely to the situation at hand. Persons interested in meditation are often heard to complain, “But I don’t have time to meditate.” However, the form of mindfulness we are now discussing can be practiced at all times and in all situations regardless of one’s occupation or social and religious commitments.

As with breathing meditation, the primary intent of this discipline is to prepare one’s mind for advanced stages of psychological development. However, a valuable by-product is that it can greatly increase one’s proficiency at physical skills. In Japan, Zen practitioners have utilized it to achieve mastery in swordsmanship, archery, and judo. The Buddha himself is quoted: “Mindfulness, I declare, O monks, is helpful everywhere.” [24] And again:

Whosoever, monks, has cultivated and regularly practiced mindfulness of the body, to whatever state realizable by direct knowledge he may bend his mind for reaching it by direct knowledge, he will then acquire proficiency in that very field. [25]

For one engaged in strict monastic training, mindfulness of

actions becomes a more formalized practice. Breathing and walking meditations often are alternated for periods of about thirty minutes each. In walking the monk paces slowly along a level stretch of ground and directs his attention fully to the movement of each foot, thinking: "lift"—"forward"—"down"—"lift"—"forward"—"down." This alternation of breathing and walking practice may last sixteen hours each day for a period of six or more weeks.>

Repulsiveness, Material Components, and Cemetery Meditations

The last of the body meditations are designed to overcome one's narcissistic infatuation for one's own body, to abandon unrealistic desires for immortality, and to destroy sensual lust. To achieve these ends two principles are employed. First is vividly and repeatedly impressing upon one's mind the temporary, changing, and compounded nature of the body. Secondly one establishes and persistently reinforces a series of negative associations to the usually sensual features of the body. This latter process employs the same principles as behavior therapy and Pavlovian conditioning. However, Satipaṭṭhāna differs from Pavlovian and behavior therapy in that the conditioning is established by the meditator himself instead of an external agent.

Thus the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta continues:

> And further, monks, a monk reflects on this very body enveloped by the skin and full of manifold impurity, from the soles up, and from the top of the

head hair down, thinking thus: "There are in this body hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidney, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, gorge, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, nasal mucus, synovial fluid, urine."

Just as if there were a double-mouthed provision bag full of various kinds of grain such as hill paddy, paddy, green gram, cow-peas, sesamum, and husked rice, and a man with sound eyes, having opened that bag, were to take stock of the contents thus: "This is hill paddy, this is paddy, this is green gram, this is cow-pea, this is sesamum, this is husked rice." Just so, monks, a monk reflects on this very body, enveloped by the skin and full of manifold impurity, from the soles up, and from the top of the head hair down, thinking thus: "There are in this body hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidney, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, gorge, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, nasal mucus, synovial fluid, urine."

And further, monks, a monk reflects on this very body however it be placed or disposed, by way of the material elements: "There are in this body the element of earth, the element of water, the element of

fire (caloricity), the element of air."

Just as if, monks, a clever cow-butcher or his apprentice, having slaughtered a cow and divided it into portions, should be sitting at the junction of four high roads, in the same way, a monk reflects on this very body, as it is placed or disposed, by way of the material elements: "There are in this body the elements of earth, water, fire and air."

This last paragraph is explained in the *Visuddhimagga:*

Just as the butcher, while feeding the cow, bringing it to the shambles, keeping it tied up after bringing it there, slaughtering it, and seeing it slaughtered and dead, does not lose the perception "cow" so long as he has not carved it up and divided it into parts; but when he has divided it up and is sitting there he loses the perception "cow" and the perception "meat" occurs; he does not think "I am selling cow" or "They are carrying cow away," but rather he thinks "I am selling meat" or "They are carrying meat away"; so too this monk, while still a foolish ordinary person—both formerly as a layman and as one gone forth into homelessness—, does not lose the perception "living being" or "man" or "person" so long as he does not, by resolution of the compact into elements, review this body, however placed, however disposed, as consisting of elements. But when he does review it as consisting of elements, he loses the perception "living

being" and his mind establishes itself upon elements. [26]

The last of the body meditations are the nine cemetery meditations. Numbers 1, 2, 5, and 9 respectively are quoted here. The remaining five are similar and deal with intermediate stages of decomposition:

> And further, monks, as if a monk sees a body dead, one, two or three days, swollen, blue and festering, thrown in the charnel ground, he then applies this perception to his own body thus: "Verily, also my own body is of the same nature; such it will become and will not escape it."
>
> And further, monks, as if a monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground, being eaten by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals or by different kinds of worms, he then applies this perception to his own body thus: "Verily, also my own body is of the same nature; such it will become and will not escape it."
>
> And further, monks, as if a monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground and reduced to a skeleton without flesh and blood, held together by the tendons…
>
> And further, monks, as if a monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground and reduced to bones, gone rotten and become dust, he then applies this perception to his own body thus: "Verily, also my

own body is of the same nature; such it will become and will not escape it."

Similar meditations on the digestion and decomposition of food are listed in other sections of the Pali scriptures for the purpose of freeing the practitioner from undue cravings for food:

When a monk devotes himself to this perception of repulsiveness in nutriment, his mind retreats, retracts and recoils from craving for flavors. He nourishes himself with nutriment without vanity… [27]

While these meditations are intended to eliminate passion and craving they carry the risk of making one morbid and depressed. Therefore the Buddha recommended:

If in the contemplation of the body, bodily agitation, or mental lassitude or distraction should arise in the meditator, then he should turn his mind to a gladdening subject. Having done so, joy will arise in him. [28]

A cartoon in an American medical magazine shows four senior medical students standing together. Three are engaged in active conversation. Only the remaining one turns his head to take notice of a pretty nurse. The caption beneath the cartoon reads: "Guess which one has *not* done twelve pelvic examinations today." It is doubtful that many persons outside of the medical profession will appreciate the meaning, but to medical students and interns it speaks a reality. During his months of training in obstetrics and

gynecology the medical trainee must spend many hours engaged in examining and handling the most repulsive aspects of female genitals. As a result he finds the female body becoming less attractive and his sexual urges diminishing. During my own years as a medical student and intern, this observation was repeatedly confirmed by the comments of my co-workers, both married and single. As we have seen, the same principle is utilized in the sections of the Discourse on repulsiveness and the cemetery meditations.

Other aspects of scientific and medical training can produce results similar to those sought in the latter three body meditations. Chemistry, biochemistry, and histology foster an objective way of viewing the body which is virtually identical to the contemplation of elements. Anatomy, of course, is similar to the contemplation of repulsiveness. And in hospital training the persistent encounter with old age, debilitation, and death continuously reinforces the words of the cemetery meditations: “Verily, also my own body is of the same nature; such it will become and will not escape it.” Similarly, in order to acquire a vivid mental image of the cemetery meditations, Buddhist monks occasionally visit graveyards to behold corpses in various stages of decay. [29] However, such experiences bear fruit only if one takes advantage of them and avoids the temptation to ignore and forget.>

Discursive Meditations

Successful application of the Satipaṭṭhāna meditations requires developed concentration, which in turn necessitates many hours of practice. There are, however, a variety of discursive meditations and related practices which the lay devotee can utilize to notable advantage. Some of these are not meditations in the strict sense of the word and are commonplace in virtually all religions.

A hymn, a poem, a passage from the Dhamma, or a passage from any inspiring literature can temporarily elevate the mind and serve to cultivate wholesome feelings. Many Buddhists make a habit of setting aside a few minutes each day to reflect upon the Teaching or to either read or recite from memory some favored passage of the Dhammapada. For some, similar benefits may be gained from an evening stroll, a period of solitude in forest or desert, or a pause for contemplative relaxation in the midst of a hurried day. These latter three serve the added advantage of allowing one to reflect upon one's values and reappraise oneself.

Perhaps the most popular discursive meditation practiced by Theravādin Buddhists is the meditation on love (*mettā*). It is often recited in the morning in order to create a

wholesome mood for the rest of the day. [30] There are several versions, one of which is as follows:

> My mind is temporarily pure, free from all impurities; free from lust, hatred and ignorance; free from all evil thoughts.
>
> My mind is pure and clean. Like a polished mirror is my stainless mind.
>
> As a clean and empty vessel is filled with pure water I now fill my clean heart and pure mind with peaceful and sublime thoughts of boundless love, overflowing compassion, sympathetic joy, and perfect equanimity.
>
> I have now washed my mind and heart of anger, ill will, cruelty, violence, jealousy, envy, passion, and aversion.
>
> May I be well and happy!
>
> May I be free from suffering, disease, grief, worry, and anger!
>
> May I be strong, self-confident, healthy, and peaceful!
>
> Now I charge every particle of my system, from head to foot, with thoughts of boundless love and compassion. I am the embodiment of love and compassion. My whole body is saturated with love and compassion. I am a stronghold, a fortress of love

and compassion.

What I have gained I now give unto others.

Think of all your near and dear ones at home, individually or collectively, and fill them with thoughts of loving-kindness and wish them peace and happiness, repeating, "May all beings be well and happy!" Then think of all seen and unseen beings, living near and far, men, women, animals and all living beings, in the East, West, North, South, above and below, and radiate boundless loving-kindness, without any enmity or obstruction, towards all, irrespective of class, creed, color or sex.

Think that all are your brothers and sisters, fellow-beings in the ocean of life. You identify yourself with all. You are one with all.

Repeat ten times—*May all be well and happy*—and wish them all peace and happiness. [31]

Another useful meditation for laymen is as follows:

May I be generous and helpful!
May I be well-disciplined and refined in manners!
May I be pure and clean in all my dealings!
May my thoughts, words and deeds be pure!
May I not be selfish and self-possessive but selfless and disinterested!
May I be able to sacrifice my pleasures for the sake of

others!
May I be wise and be able to see things as they truly are!
May I see the light of Truth and lead others from darkness to light!
May I be enlightened and be able to enlighten others!
May I be able to give the benefit of my knowledge to others!
May I be energetic, vigorous, and persevering!
May I strive diligently until I achieve my goal!
May I be fearless in facing dangers and courageously surmount all obstacles!
May I be able to serve others to the best of my ability!
May I be ever patient!
May I be able to bear and forbear the wrongs of others!
May I ever be tolerant and see the good and beautiful in all!
May I ever be truthful and honest!
May I ever be kind, friendly, and compassionate!
May I be able to regard all as my brothers and sisters and be one with all!
May I ever be calm, serene, unruffled, and peaceful!
May I gain a balanced mind!
May I have perfect equanimity! [32]

In the mind of a devout Buddhist, Gotama Buddha symbolizes the embodiment of one's highest spiritual ideals.

Consequently, the Buddha is often taken as a meditation subject.

As long as (the meditator) recollects the special qualities of the Buddha in this way, "For this and this reason the Blessed One is accomplished,… for this and this reason he is blessed," then on that occasion his mind is not obsessed by greed, or obsessed by hate, or obsessed by delusion; his mind has rectitude on that occasion, being inspired by the Perfect One. [33]

When a noble disciple contemplates upon the Enlightened One, at that time his mind is not enwrapped by lust nor by hatred nor by delusion and at that time his mind is rightly directed towards the Tathāgata. And with a rightly directed mind the noble disciple gains enthusiasm for the goal, enthusiasm for the Dhamma, gains the delight derived from the Dhamma. In him thus delighted, joy arises; to one joyfully minded, body and mind become calm; calmed in body and mind, he feels at ease; and if at ease, the mind finds concentration. [34]

The hazard in meditating on the Buddha, however, is that the unsophisticated meditator may not be aware of the psychological reasons for this exercise. In such a case the practice is likely to become a devotional one similar to those of non-Buddhist religions.>

Mindfulness of Feelings, Consciousness, and Mental Objects

Some time ago I became acquainted with a Western Buddhist who for several years had made a daily practice of meditating on love. He confided that he had chosen this meditation subject because he was prone to frequent outbreaks of anger and chronic resentment; a "hate problem" he termed it. But despite years of meditation, the hatred had not diminished; the meditation had failed. Why? As our acquaintance broadened the answer became apparent. My friend had several poorly-concealed intellectual and emotional deficiencies. He never once revealed that he acknowledged these; on the contrary, he displayed frequent attempts to bolster his self-image. Such attempts were invariably doomed to frustration, especially when his accomplishments and social poise were contrasted with those of others. By reacting with anger towards others he avoided the unpleasantry of looking at himself. In other words, his anger was a psychological defense through which he sought to maintain an illusion of self-esteem. Thus unconsciously he did not wish to relinquish his anger. To do

so would be too painful, and to attack the anger by meditating on love was futile, for anger was only a symptom. The real problem lay much deeper.

To cure such hatred requires three things. First one must become aware of the existence of one's inadequacies and their accompanying humiliations; in other words, what is unconscious must become conscious. Second one must totally confront such unpleasant feelings and acknowledge them in their entirety. And finally one must relinquish the egotistical desire for self-exaltation. This last requirement is best achieved by objectively analyzing the illusion of self and gaining full appreciation for the changing and compounded nature of the personality. In other words, one must acquire insight of both types discussed above under the goals of meditation. How can this be achieved?

Awareness of unconscious feelings is rarely obtained through logical deductions or rational explanations. A person who harbors these feelings will either refuse to believe what he is told or will come to accept it only as so much factual information devoid of emotional significance. An excellent illustration is the case of a forty-year-old woman who sought psychiatric help for severe feelings of fear, guilt, and depression. On examining her case it became apparent that her problem was largely due to repressed feelings of hatred for her mother, a very dominating and selfish woman. After much discussion the patient finally deduced that she indeed did hate her mother, and for the next two months she spoke knowingly and learnedly about

her repressed hatred and resultant symptoms. Yet she improved not one bit. Then one day she entered the office shaking with rage and cried, “God, I hate that witch!” There was never a more vivid example of the difference between knowing and experiencing. Improvement quickly followed.

This example is typical of many psychiatric case histories. One sees patients who speak in the most erudite manner about Freud and Jung and adeptly employ psychiatric terminology. Yet this intellectual verbiage is often a subtle defense against facing their true feelings. Conversely, many unsophisticated and unlearned patients are quick to achieve insight and make rapid progress. Consequently, the skillful psychiatrist makes limited use of technical jargon and theoretical concepts. He asks questions often but answers few. This same technique is employed in Burmese and Zen meditation centers. The student is discouraged from making philosophical inquiries and is told: “Pursue your meditation, and soon you will see.” [35]

You may, Ānanda, also keep in mind this marvellous and wonderful quality of the Tathāgata (the Buddha): knowingly arise feelings in the Tathāgata, knowingly they continue, knowingly they cease; knowingly arise perceptions in the Tathāgata, knowingly they continue, knowingly they cease; knowingly arise thoughts in the Tathāgata, knowingly they continue, knowingly they cease. This, Ānanda, you may also keep in mind as a marvellous and wonderful quality of the Tathāgata. [36]

In his earlier years Sigmund Freud experimented with hypnosis. He found it a useful tool in revealing unconscious feelings and conflicts to the *therapist,* but it was of little value to the patient. The reason was that hypnotic trance precluded the patient from consciously confronting and resolving his problems. Therefore, Freud abandoned hypnosis in preference to the now standard procedures of psychiatry and psycho-analysis. These same findings and conclusions have often been repeated by later researchers and clinicians. Similarly, the Buddha rejected the use of trance states so common in yogic practice and developed a means by which people can acquire insight without the aid of a therapist or psychedelic drugs. Two approaches are employed.

The easier approach to insight is one which both monks and laymen can use regardless of meditative development. It consists in developing the habit of reflecting on one's feelings from time to time and detecting the motives which produce seemingly spontaneous words and deeds. "Why did I say that?" "Why am I tense when I meet so and so?" "I find myself disliking such and such a character in this novel. Why is that? Of whom does he remind me?"

For those who have progressed in the breathing meditation or made similar progress at quieting the mind, unconscious feelings become more readily accessible. As one begins to shut out sensory distractions and halt discursive thinking, more subtle sensations come into awareness. At first there may be only a vague feeling of anxiety, some unexplained

sense of guilt, or a feeling of anger. Without recourse to verbal whys or hows and avoiding any speculative conjecture the meditator directs full attention to the feeling alone. He brings only the feeling itself into full awareness and allows no interfering thoughts, though later he will benefit by reflecting on it in a contemplative manner. It is at this point that repressed memories and emotional conflicts may come into awareness. Here also, meditation can be potentially dangerous for those whose personality structures are loosely constituted or who have repressed emotional problems of severe intensity. Usually, however, in these latter instances one's unconscious defenses will intervene and the meditator will terminate the practice because he feels anxious, or "can't concentrate," or "just quit because I felt like it."

Thus the last three sections of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta read as follows:

> *Mindfulness of feelings*—the second of the four foundations of mindfulness:
>
> Herein, monks, a monk when experiencing a pleasant feeling knows, "I experience a pleasant feeling"; when experiencing a painful feeling, he knows, "I experience a painful feeling"; when experiencing a neutral feeling, he knows, "I experience a neutral feeling…
>
> *Mindfulness of consciousness*—the third of the four foundations of mindfulness:

Herein, monks, a monk knows the consciousness with lust, as with lust; the consciousness without lust, as without lust; the consciousness with hate, as with hate; the consciousness without hate, as without hate; the consciousness with ignorance, as with ignorance; the consciousness without ignorance, as without ignorance; the shrunken (i.e., rigid and indolent) state of consciousness as the shrunken state; the distracted (i.e., restless) state of consciousness as the distracted state; the developed state of consciousness as the developed state; the undeveloped state of consciousness as the undeveloped state…

Mindfulness of mental objects—the fourth of the four foundations of mindfulness:

Herein, monks, when sense-desire is present, a monk knows, "There is sense-desire in me," or when sense-desire is not present, he knows, "There is no sense-desire in me." He knows how the arising of the non-arisen sense-desire comes to be; he knows how the abandoning of the arisen sense-desire comes to be; and he knows how the non-arising in the future of the abandoned sense-desire comes to be.

When anger is present, he knows, "There is anger in me."… (as above for sense-desire)… When sloth and torpor are present… When agitation and worry are present… When doubt is present… (as above)."

> Herein, monks, when the enlightenment-factor of mindfulness is present, the monk knows, "The enlightenment-factor of mindfulness is in me," or when the enlightenment-factor of mindfulness is absent, he knows, "The enlightenment-factor of mindfulness is not in me"; and he knows how the arising of the non-arisen enlightenment-factor of mindfulness comes to be; and how the perfection in the development of the arisen enlightenment-factor of mindfulness comes to be.

This paragraph on mindfulness is then repeated in the same wording for the remaining six enlightenment-factors, i.e., investigation of reality, energy, happiness, tranquillity, concentration, and equanimity. These seven bear the title "enlightenment-factors" as they are said to be the essential states for the realization of Nibbāna.

Leaving the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta for a moment, we note another of the Buddha's sayings:

> "Is there a way, monks, by which a monk without recourse to faith, to cherished opinions, to tradition, to specious reasoning, to the approval of views pondered upon, may declare the Final Knowledge (of Sainthood)?… There is such a way, O monks. And which is it? Herein, monks, a monk has seen a form with his eyes, and if greed, hate or delusion are in him, he knows: 'There is in me greed, hate, delusion'; and if greed, hate or delusion are not in him, he

knows: 'There is no greed, hate, delusion in me.' Further, monks, a monk has heard a sound, smelled an odor, tasted a flavor, felt a tactile sensation, cognized a mental object (idea), and if greed, hate or delusion are in him, he knows: 'There is in me greed, hate, delusion'; and if greed, hate or delusion are not in him, he knows: 'There is in me no greed, hate, delusion.' And if he thus knows, O monks, are these ideas such as to be known by recourse to faith, to cherished opinions, to tradition, to specious reasoning, to the approval of views pondered upon?"

"Certainly not, Lord."

"Are these not rather ideas to be known after wisely realizing them by experience?"

"That is so, Lord."

"This, monks, is a way by which a monk, without recourse to faith, to cherished opinions, to tradition, to specious reasoning, to the approval of views pondered upon, may declare the Final Knowledge (of Sainthood)." **[37]**

Thus far we have discussed how one achieves insight as the first step towards eliminating unwholesome feelings and motivations. Following insight one must totally confront these newly discovered feelings and acknowledge them fully and impartially. One must see their true nature devoid of any emotional reactions (such as guilt or craving) and

devoid of preconceived notions about their good or evil qualities. In other words, complete attention is focused on the feeling itself in order that one may examine it objectively in its naked reality, free of any cultural and personal assumptions as to its desirability. This achievement results from the Satipaṭṭhāna practices described above. [38]

As an example, in a typical case of anger one is cognizant of being angry, yet a much greater amount of attention is directed outward. Most typically the angry mind quickly perceives and dwells upon the objectionable and offensive features of some other person (or persons). And in so doing indignation, resentment, and anger increase. These objectionable features of the other person may be fancied, exaggerated, or real, but in any case, were it not for the anger such preoccupations would not have arisen. The Buddhist approach is to turn attention to the real problem—the anger. One reflects, "I am angry."… "I am doing this because I am angry."… "I am having these thoughts because I am angry." In so doing one avoids dwelling on alleged injustices, etc., and thereby does not intensify the hatred. This reflection continues, "This is anger."… "It is real; it is intense."… "It is a feeling."… "It has no reality outside of my own consciousness."… "Like all feelings, it will soon diminish."… "I experience it but am not compelled to act on it." With practice one finds that though anger still arises, its effect is diminished. Its influence is no longer as strong. In the case of painful emotions, such as humiliation, it is advantageous to also reflect, "This is most

painful."… "I do not like it; but I can confront it."… "I can endure it."… "Even though it is unpleasant, I can tolerate it." In instances of greed and passion it is often fruitful to consider "Is this truly pleasurable?"… "Is it rewarding?"… "Am I now happy?"

It should be noted that this important technique can also be employed in the course of daily living without unusual powers of concentration or formal meditation practice.

In the words of the Buddha:

> There are three kinds of feeling, O monks: pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling, and neutral feeling. For the full understanding of these three kinds of feelings, O monks, the four foundations of mindfulness should be cultivated. [39]
>
> In pleasant feelings, monks, the inclination to greed should be given up; in unpleasant feelings the inclination to aversion should be given up; in neutral feelings the inclination to ignorance should be given up. If a monk has given up in pleasant feelings the inclination to greed, in unpleasant feelings the inclination to aversion, and in neutral feelings the inclination to ignorance, then he is called one who is free of (unsalutary) inclinations, one who sees clearly. He has cut off cravings, sundered the fetters, and through the destruction of conceit, has made an end of suffering.
>
> If one feels joy, but knows not feeling's nature,

Bent towards greed, he will not find
deliverance.
If one feels pain, but knows not feeling's
nature,
Bent towards hate, he will not find
deliverance.
And even neutral feeling which as peaceful
The Lord of Wisdom has proclaimed,
If, in attachment, he should cling to it, this
Will not set free him from the round of ill.
But if a monk is ardent and does not neglect
To practice mindfulness and comprehension
clear,
The nature of all feelings will he penetrate.
And having done so, in this very life
Will he be free from cankers, from all taints.
Mature in knowledge, firm in Dhamma's
ways,
When once his life-span ends, his body breaks,
All measure and concepts will be
transcended. [40]

After getting rid of sensual cravings and after uncovering, confronting, and relinquishing unwholesome emotions, there remains only one fetter to be resolved. This is narcissism, the infatuation for one's self, which results in egotism, and an endless quest for social recognition and self-exaltation. Perpetuating this fetter is the illusion that

one has a true or unchanging self, the "real me." In reality there is no such entity; instead there are only feelings, sensations, and emotions, and once we gain full appreciation of this fact, once it becomes a living reality to us, narcissism diminishes. Among the Buddha's teachings are numerous passages like the following:

There is no corporeality, no feeling, no perception, no mental formations, no consciousness that is permanent, enduring and lasting, and that, not subject to any change, will eternally remain the same. If there existed such an ego that is permanent, enduring and lasting, and not subject to any change, then the holy life leading to the complete extinction of suffering will not be possible. [41]

Better it would be to consider the body as the ego rather than the mind. And why? Because this body may last for ten, twenty, thirty, forty or fifty years, even for a hundred years and more. But that which is called "mind, consciousness, thinking," arises continuously, during day and night, as one thing, and as something different again it vanishes. [42]

Such statements, however, are merely philosophical arguments through which one may intellectually accept this fact. Only by experiencing it as a living reality and by an impartial analysis of the self do we relinquish egotism. Thus in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, after each of the six body meditations and after each of the meditations on feeling, consciousness, and mental objects, the following passage

occurs. (Quoted here is the section on feelings. The words "body," "consciousness," and "mental objects" are substituted for the word "feelings" in their respective sections of the sutta.)

Thus he lives contemplating feelings in himself, or he lives contemplating feelings in other persons, or he lives contemplating feelings both in himself and in others. He lives contemplating origination-factors in feelings, or he lives contemplating dissolution-factors in feelings, or he lives contemplating origination-and-dissolution factors in feelings. Or his mindfulness is established with the thought, "Feeling exists," to the extent necessary just for knowledge and mindfulness, and he lives independent, and clings to nothing in the world. Thus, monks, a monk lives contemplating feelings.

In the instance of anger, one would reflect: "This is anger."… "It is a feeling."… "I do not identify with it."… "It will eventually be replaced by another feeling, which in turn will be replaced by still another."… "I am a composite of various feelings; a changing aggregate of attitudes, values, and thoughts; no one of which is permanent."… "There is no eternal I." As such objectivity and detachment increases, anger diminishes, for no longer is there an ego to be defended and no self which can be offended.

Except for a concluding section on the Four Noble Truths (see above, p.3), we have now discussed all but two portions of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. These remaining two are included

under the section on mental objects and are primarily intended to free one from sensual craving and the illusion of self:

> Herein, monks, a monk thinks: "Thus is material form; thus is the arising of material form; and thus is the disappearance of material form. Thus is feeling; thus is the arising of feeling; and thus is the disappearance of feeling. Thus is perception; thus is the arising of perception; and thus is the disappearance of perception. Thus are mental formations (i.e., thoughts); thus is the arising of mental formations; and thus is the disappearance of mental formations. Thus is consciousness; thus is the arising of consciousness; and thus is the disappearance of consciousness."
>
> Herein, monks, a monk knows the eye and visual forms, and the fetter that arises dependent on both; he knows how the arising of the non-arisen fetter comes to be; he knows how the abandoning of the arisen fetter comes to be; and he knows how the non-arising in the future of the abandoned fetter comes to be.

This latter passage is repeated five times with "ear and sound," ṅose and smells," "tongue and flavors," "body and tactual objects," and "mind and mental objects" respectively substituted where "eye and visual forms" appears above.

We have thus completed the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. In summary, it first prescribes mindfulness of breathing as a technique for quieting the mind and developing concentration. This same heightened awareness is then developed for all voluntary physical actions. Next are the meditations on repulsiveness, elements, and death, which are intended to free one from bodily attachment and lust; this is done by contemplating the temporary and changing nature of the body and by developing negative and unpleasant associations. The remaining three sections enable the practitioner to become fully aware of his thoughts, feelings, and emotions and to confront them impartially in their true nature. With each of these exercises, one also objectively notes that each facet of his own mind and body is temporary, compounded, and changing, and therefore there exists no immortal soul, unchanging essence, or true self.

One important fact should be noted. Neither in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta nor in any of the other seven steps of the Eightfold Path is advocated the denial or suppression of feelings. It is a widely spread and inaccurate belief that Theravada Buddhism attempts to destroy evil thoughts by forcing them from the mind. Suppression of undesirable thoughts is advocated in only a few parts of the Pali Canon and is to be used only in special cases when other measures fail. **[43]**

In southern Asia it is becoming a common practice for both monks and laymen to enter a meditation center for periods

of from six to twelve weeks. Here one dons the white robe of an *upāsaka* and is removed from all social contacts and material possessions. Previous social status and identity soon come to have little meaning, thus minimizing the effect of established habits and adaptations and thereby enhancing the opportunities for personality growth. The food is palatable but bland, and one eats and sleeps in moderation according to a strict schedule, and even eating and dressing become routine meditation practices. Virtually every waking moment is dedicated to meditation. Here progress is made at a rate impossible to achieve by setting aside an hour or two in the midst of a busy day. After his stay is over, the layman returns to family life and continues his daily one-hour practice. However, not all meditation centers are of high quality. Many are lax; a few are corrupt, and a few teach unorthodox meditations which are not truly Buddhist. Thus a person seeking entry should first make inquiries and would do well to avoid centers which make an effort to recruit Westerners for the sake of publicity and prestige. Satipaṭṭhāna meditation centers exist in North America, and courses are given in England.>

The Eighth Step

The last step of the Noble Eightfold Path is termed right concentration and concerns the attainment of the four absorptions or *jhānas.* These states are achieved by an extreme degree of concentration and mental quietude beyond that usually sought through mindfulness of breathing. Yet, unlike Satipaṭṭhāna, the jhānas are not a prerequisite to Enlightenment. Some teachers say one may obtain Nibbāna without reaching the absorptions, and they alone will not produce Nibbāna. Also, there is the danger of one becoming enamoured with them and not striving for further progress. However, achieving the jhānas can facilitate one's progress. [44]

In these states all visual, tactile, auditory, and other sense impressions have ceased, while the mind remains alert and fully awake. The first jhāna is described as having five qualities absent and five present. Absent are lust, anger, sloth, agitation, and doubt. Present are a mild degree of conceptual thought, a mild degree of discursive thinking, rapture, happiness, and concentration. With the removal of all conceptual thought and discursive thinking one enters the second jhāna, which has the qualities of concentration, rapture, and happiness. Then with the abandonment of

rapture, one enters the third jhāna in which only equanimous happiness and concentration remain. The distinctive factors of the fourth absorption are equanimity and concentration. This last jhāna is realized after giving up all joy and sorrow and is described as a state beyond pleasure and pain. [45]

The jhānas are obtained by mindfulness of breathing with a steady, progressive quieting of the breath. [46] They may also be realized through the *kasiṇa* meditations and meditating on equanimity. [47]

At this point it is interesting to speculate on the phenomena of parapsychology. Despite the fraudulent and careless investigations which have been done in psychical research, there still remains a sizable number of reliable and carefully controlled studies (especially in England) which have demonstrated that people do, indeed, possess the faculties of telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition (i.e., respectively, the abilities to read another's thoughts, to see or know distant happenings beyond the range of normal vision, and to foretell future events). In addition some researchers claim to have established the existence of psychokinesis, the power of mind over matter, but the evidence for psychokinesis is inconclusive and most experiments have failed to demonstrate its validity. Of those parapsychology subjects who have been tested to date, even the best guess incorrectly as often as correctly and are unable to determine which of their guesses are correct. That is, while being tested, the ESP subject is unable to

distinguish between guesses and true extra-sensory information. [48] One might wonder if the process of reducing sensory impressions and stilling discursive thoughts would enhance these psychic abilities.

According to the Pali texts there are five psychical powers which can be obtained through meditation. These five include psychokinesis, telepathy, and clairvoyance, plus two others. The additional two are the "divine ear" or clairaudience (the auditory counterpart of clairvoyance) and the ability to recall past lives. [49] Precognition itself is not listed among these but is mentioned in other sections of the Tipiṭaka. Reliable use of these powers is allegedly possessed only by those who have achieved the four jhānas either with or without Nibbāna. [50] Thus, like more worldly talents, Nibbāna alone does not produce them. [51]

The most important consideration, however, is that Buddhism places very little emphasis on paranormal phenomena and regards them as by-products of spiritual development rather than goals. In fact, the novice is cautioned against experimenting with them, since they distract from one's true goals and in some cases can be obstructive or even dangerous. [52]

Supernormal powers are the supernormal powers of the ordinary man. They are hard to maintain, like a prone infant or like a baby hare, and the slightest thing breaks them. But they are an impediment for insight, not for concentration, since they are obtainable through concentration. So the

supernormal powers are an impediment that should be severed by one who seeks insight. [53]

Other Forms of Meditation

The Satipaṭṭhāna exercises are by far the most valuable and widely practiced of all the Theravada meditations. There are, however, a total of forty meditation subjects listed in the *Visuddhimagga* including those already mentioned, i.e., Satipaṭṭhāna practices and meditations on love, equanimity, repulsiveness of food, and the Buddha. The remaining subjects are the Dhamma, the Order of Monks, virtue, generosity, devas, peace, compassion, gladness, boundless space, boundless consciousness, nothingness, the base of neither perception nor non-perception, and the ten *kasiṇas*. Each of these subjects is intended for specific individual needs, and one should not attempt to undertake all forty. To do so would only dilute one's energies and retard progress.

A *kasiṇa* is an object (such as a clay disk, a flame, or color) which the practitioner looks at from a distance of about four feet. The eyes are alternately opened and closed until one has acquired a mental image of the object which is as vivid as the real one. **[54]** The ten kasiṇa meditations develop the jhānas and do not enhance insight.

Meditation is not an exclusively Buddhist tradition. It is equally important in the Hindu religion and because the

two schools employ similar techniques, they are often confused. Thus a comparison is warranted. Both advocate preparatory moral discipline, moderation in eating, quieting the mind, and abolition of selfish desires. The postures are similar, and the breathing meditation is practiced by many yogis. Here, however, the similarities cease. Buddhism is concerned with the empirical phenomena of conscious experience, and thus its meditations are psychologically oriented. Hinduism, on the other hand, is mystically, religiously, and metaphysically inclined. Yogic meditation, therefore, has devotional aspects often including prayer. While Buddhism emphasizes motivations and insight, Hinduism speaks of Infinite Consciousness, Cosmic Reality, and oneness with God. To the Hindu, freedom from hatred is not so much an end in itself as it is a step towards Immortality. The following typifies Hindu writings:

> Retire into a solitary room. Close your eyes. Have deep silent meditation. Feel his (God's) presence. Repeat His name OM with fervor, joy and love. Fill your heart with love. Destroy the Sankalpas, thoughts, whims, fancies, and desires when they arise from the surface of the mind. Withdraw the wandering mind and fix it upon the Lord. Now, Nishta, meditation will become deep and intense. Do not open your eyes. Do not stir from your seat. Merge in Him. Dive deep into the innermost recesses of the heart. Plunge into the shining Atma (Soul) within. Drink the nectar of Immortality. Enjoy the silence

> now. I shall leave you there alone. Nectar's son, Rejoice, Rejoice! Peace, Peace! Silence, Silence! Glory, Glory! [55]

Another important difference concerns the visions that occur during meditation. The Buddhist regards these as psychological phenomena to be dealt with in the same way as distracting thoughts. The Hindu often interprets them as psychic experiences indicative of spiritual development. In the words of Swami Sivananda:

> Sometimes Devatas (gods), Rishis (sages), Nitya Siddhas will appear in meditation. Receive them with honor. Bow to them. Get advice from them. They appear before you to help and give you encouragement. [56]

A few passages in the *Tao-Te-Ching* suggest that the Chinese mystics discovered meditation independently of Buddhist and Hindu traditions:

> Can you govern your animal soul, hold to the One and never depart from it?
>
> Can you throttle your breath, down to the softness of breath in a child?
>
> Can you purify your mystic vision and wash it until it is spotless? (v.10)
>
> Stop your senses,

Close the doors;
Let sharp things be blunted,
Tangles resolved,
The light tempered
And turmoil subdued;
For this is mystic unity
In which the Wise Man is moved
Neither by affection
Nor yet by estrangement
Or profit or loss
Or honor or shame.
Accordingly, by all the world,
He is held highest. (v. 56)

To know that you are ignorant is best;
To know what you do not, is a disease;
But if you recognize the malady
Of mind for what it is, then that is health.
The Wise Man has indeed a healthy mind;
He sees an aberration as it is
And for that reason never will
be ill. (v. 71) [57]

The exact nature of early Taoist meditation will probably remain unknown, since later Taoism has intermingled with Mahayana Buddhism.

Mahayana Buddhist meditations include all the above mentioned Theravada practices plus others. The division of Mahayana into numerous and varied sects precludes any

general statement about its practices. In some forms it bears similarities to Hinduism by virtue of devotional emphasis and prayer. In other schools this similarity is seen in the Mahayana concepts of Universal Mind, the Void, and Buddha Nature, which sometimes take precedence over the Theravada concerns of greed, hatred, and delusion. The curing of physical illness and the flow of spiritual forces through the body are other features of certain Mahayana practices:

Vibrations (during meditation) show the free passage of the vital principle. As it passes through the stomach and intestines, it vibrates when the belly is empty. But when the belly is full, it ceases to vibrate. The breath reaches the lower belly more easily when the latter is full. Vibrations are not accidental but come from the vital principle circulating in the belly. As time passes, when your meditation is more effective and the vital principle flows freely, then these vibrations will cease. [58]

Of all the Mahayana schools, Zen places the greatest emphasis upon meditation. Zen practice is much like Theravada. It focuses on quieting the mind and shuns conceptual thinking in preference to direct experience. The postures are also similar, and the initial Zen practice usually involves attention to breathing. It does not include as wide a variety of different techniques. Zen places greater emphasis on the details of correct posture and, especially in the Soto school, contrasts with Theravada by preferring group meditation to individual practice. In order to cultivate a

suitable state of mind, Zen meditation is often followed by chanting and gongs.

Perhaps the most significant difference is that, as compared to Theravada, Zen makes little mention of the need and means of dealing with motives, feelings, and emotions. It lays great emphasis upon freeing oneself from intellectualizing and conceptualizing in one's quest of "the Ultimate." But at the same time it offers scant advice on the means by which one overcomes unwholesome impulses or confronts mental hindrances that are emotional or motivational in origin.>

Scientific Evaluations of Meditation

The Venerable Anuruddha, a disciple of the Buddha, once became ill with a painful disease. On that occasion several of the monks visited him and inquired:

What might be the state of mind dwelling in which painful bodily sensations are unable to perturb the mind of the Venerable Anuruddha?

He replied:

> It is a state of mind, brethren, that is firmly grounded in the four foundations of mindfulness; and due to that, painful bodily sensations cannot perturb my mind. [59]

Throughout Buddhist history, there have been numerous other testimonies as to the benefits of Satipaṭṭhāna. Yet personal testimonies and case histories are subjective and prone to distortion. The reader may well wonder what, if any, scientific studies have been conducted. To date there are two areas of investigation which have given some evidence as to the benefits of meditation.

Sensory Deprivation

The first scientific evidence does not involve meditation per se, but concerns an experimental situation which has some similarities to meditation practice. This is sensory deprivation, which has been actively studied since 1951. There are two types of sensory deprivation. One reduces sensory input by placing the experimental subject in a totally dark, soundproof room. His hands are encased in soft cotton; the temperature is constant and mild, and he lies on a soft mattress. The other type does not reduce sensory input per se, but does diminish perception. In this latter case the subject wears opaque goggles so that he sees only a diffuse white with no forms or colors. A constant monotonous noise is generated, and no other sounds are heard. Approximately the same results are obtained in either type of experiment. In both kinds the subject lies relatively motionless; he is free to think or sleep as he pleases and may terminate the session if he so desires. Experiments have lasted from four hours to five days. [60]

The lack of practice and lack of any attempt at mental discipline makes sensory deprivation a passive procedure notably different from meditation. However, both meditation and sensory deprivation involve a temporary withdrawal from external stimuli without loss of consciousness, and thus a comparison is warranted.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of sensory

deprivation research to date is the great discrepancies in the findings of different researchers. For example, some studies have shown it to impair learning, while others find that learning is enhanced. [61] Most of the early studies reported that the great majority (in some cases all) of experimental subjects had strong visual and sometimes auditory hallucinations beginning from twenty minutes to seventy hours after entering the experiment. Other researchers, however, reported very few hallucinations. Suggestion is a partial, though not total, explanation for this difference in frequency of hallucinations. One study found that under identical sensory deprivation conditions a group of subjects which was told that hallucinations were frequent and normal had over three times more than an identical group which was given no such information. [62] This no doubt explains many of the psychic experiences of those yogi devotees who seek visions while meditating in isolation.

Recent studies have indicated that the emotional atmosphere created by the experimenters plus the subject's attitudes, knowledge, and expectations may have greater effect on the results of the experiment than do the physical aspects of sensory deprivation. [63] Regarding meditation, this fact suggests the importance of moral, intellectual, and environmental preparation. It also suggests the importance of taking a few moments before meditation to create a wholesome frame of mind.

What is most significant for the purpose of this writing, however, is whether or not sensory deprivation and its

accompanying social isolation facilitate awareness of one's inner emotional conflicts and thereby facilitate personality growth. Several studies have indicated that such is the case. Most significant was an experiment conducted on thirty white male psychiatric patients in Richmond, Virginia. The group consisted of approximately equal numbers of neurotics, schizophrenics, and character disorders, and all were subjected to a maximum six hours of sensory deprivation. Each subject was given a battery of psychological tests the day before the experiment, and the same tests were repeated the day after and again one week later. The tests rated the subjects on twenty items such as anxiety, depression, hostility, memory deficit, disorganized thinking, etc. It was found that on each of the twenty items some subjects improved, some worsened and some revealed no change. However, the desirable changes outnumbered the undesirable ones by a ratio of two to one, and one week after the experiment most of the beneficial changes were found to have persisted while the undesirable ones had mostly subsided. Some subjects showed no desirable changes on any of the twenty items; others revealed as many as thirteen. The average subject improved on four of the twenty items and worsened on two. The experimenters also reported that the subjects displayed "increased awareness of inner conflicts and anxieties, and heightened perception of the fact that their difficulties stemmed from inner rather than outer factors… A second major change observed was a less rigid utilization of repressive and

inhibitory defenses. The reduction of incoming stimulation led to recall and verbalization of previously forgotten experiences in many instances. For some subjects this recall was anxiety-inducing…" [64]

Other studies have supported this finding that short term sensory deprivation is psychologically beneficial. (Deprivation of a day or more is likely to be detrimental.) However, other carefully conducted investigations have found no such improvements, [65] and therefore further studies are indicated before any definite conclusions can be made about the therapeutic value of sensory deprivation.

Electroencephalographic Analysis of Meditation

In 1963 a fascinating and unique report on Zen meditation was presented by Dr. Akira Kasamatsu and Dr. Tomio Hirai of the Department of Neuro-Psychiatry, Tokyo University. It contained the results of a ten-year study of the brain wave or electroencephalographic (EEG) tracings of Zen masters. [66] , [67]

The EEG tracings revealed that about ninety seconds after an accomplished Zen practitioner begins meditation, a rhythmic slowing in the brain wave pattern known as alpha waves occurs. This slowing occurs *with eyes open* and

progresses with meditation, and after thirty minutes one finds rhythmic alpha waves of seven or eight per second. This effect persists for some minutes after meditation. What is most significant is that this EEG pattern is notably different from those of sleep, normal waking consciousness, and hypnotic trance, and is unusual in persons who have not made considerable progress in meditation. In other words, it suggests an unusual mental state; though from the subjective reports of the practitioners, it does not appear to be a unique or highly unusual conscious experience. It was also found that a Zen master's evaluation of the amount of progress another practitioner had made correlated directly with the latter's EEG changes.

Another finding of the same study concerned what is called alpha blocking and habituation. To understand these phenomena let us imagine that a person who is reading quietly is suddenly interrupted by a loud noise. For a few seconds his attention is diverted from the reading to the noise. If the same sound is then repeated a few seconds later his attention will again be diverted, only not as strongly nor for as long a time. If the sound is then repeated at regular intervals, the person will continue reading and become oblivious to the sound. A normal subject with closed eyes produces alpha waves on an EEG tracing. An auditory stimulation, such as a loud noise, normally obliterates alpha waves for seven seconds or more; this is termed alpha blocking. In a Zen master the alpha blocking produced by the first noise lasts only two seconds. If the noise is repeated

at 15 second intervals, we find that in the normal subject there is virtually no alpha blocking remaining by the fifth successive noise. This diminution of alpha blocking is termed habituation and persists in normal subjects for as long as the noise continues at regular and frequent intervals. In the Zen master, however, no habituation is seen. His alpha blocking lasts two seconds with the first sound, two seconds with the fifth sound, and two seconds with the twentieth sound. This implies that the Zen master has a greater awareness of his environment as the paradoxical result of meditative concentration. One master described such a state of mind as that of noticing every person he sees on the street but of not looking back with emotional lingering.>

The Social Fruits of Meditation

Through science, technology, and social organization Western man has built a civilization of unprecedented wealth and grandeur. Yet despite this mastery of his environment, he has given little thought to mastery of himself. In fact, his newly-acquired wealth and leisure have heightened his sensuality and weakened his self-discipline. It becomes increasingly apparent, however, that a stable and prosperous democracy can endure only so long as we have intelligent, self-disciplined, and properly motivated citizens; legislation and education alone will not ensure this. Buddhism presents a technique by which this can be obtained, but the responsibility rests with each individual. No one can cure our neuroses and strengthen our characters except ourselves.

In the Sumbha country in the town of Sedaka the Buddha once said:

> "I shall protect myself," in that way the foundations of mindfulness should be practiced. "I shall protect others," in that way the foundations of mindfulness should be practiced. Protecting oneself one protects others; protecting others one protects oneself. And

how does one, in protecting oneself, protect others? By the repeated and frequent practice of meditation. And how does one, in protecting others, protect oneself? By patience and forbearance, by a non-violent and harmless life, by loving-kindness and compassion. “I shall protect myself,” in that way the foundations of mindfulness should be practiced. “I shall protect others,” in that way the foundations of mindfulness should be practiced. Protecting oneself, one protects others; protecting others, one protects oneself. [68]>

Appendix

Some Observations and Suggestions for Insight Meditation

The preceding was written in 1964 with a few minor revisions and additions made in the latter part of 1965. Now, at the start of 1972 and after six years in Thailand, it seems befitting that I review my own words. For the past years have not only added to my own experience with meditation, they have also brought me into close and prolonged contact (often close friendships) with other meditation practitioners many of whom are more dedicated, more skillful, and more experienced than I.

One is impressed with the variety of personalities who undertake practice. Some are experimental, critical, and pragmatic; others more devotional, dedicated, and idealistic. Some seem well adjusted and at peace with themselves and the world, while others seem desperate to find happiness and purpose in life. Some adhere literally to every detail of the scriptures, while some instead are dedicated to the interpretations and methods of their respective teachers. Still others attempt to find the ways and

means alone by their own individual and unaided efforts. Likewise the techniques and methods which these people have undertaken are also highly varied and divergent.

During this period of personal practice and consultation with others, I have seen what I believe to be some genuine achievements and also some notable failures. The question then is: What is it that succeeds and what is it that does not? And why? Or to state the matter more precisely: One may succeed in one area of meditative development but not in another.

In order to evaluate progress at meditation one must have some criteria or standards against which to judge. Thus we must ask ourselves, what is it that, short of Nibbāna, we expect to find in one who has made genuine progress along the Eightfold Path? Momentary periods of euphoria, altered perceptions, or other transient episodes of unusual states of consciousness are not what we seek. Likewise, we are not in pursuit of occult powers, unusual EEG patterns, or control of the autonomic nervous system (such as slowing the heart rate or changing body temperature).

With reference to the Four Noble Truths, we note the Buddha's words: "One thing do I teach: suffering (i.e., *dukkha*) and the end of suffering." Thus if one has truly progressed, we would expect that where previously sad and depressed, one is now less so; where previously selfish, one is now more giving; where previously defensive, secretive, and guarded, one is now more open and self-assured.

Worry and anxiety should be reduced. Objective humility should replace conceit. Instead of recurrent thoughts of anger and "getting even" one is more forgiving and at peace with the world. It is felt that such attainments have been observed, occurring as the result of properly directed Buddhist practice.

Again with reference to the Four Noble Truths, it is craving or desire which causes our unhappiness and produces our mental defilements. Thus only by attacking the problems of craving, wanting, and desiring can progress be made. I speak now not so much of the crude and obvious desires such as hunger and sex but of the more subtle ones of egotism, emotional dependency, and desires for possession. One may fast for two weeks and yet never once look at the fact that the real reason for fasting is to feed one's ego—to be better, more disciplined, more pious than one's fellow practitioners. Or one may work diligently attempting to win the approval, confidence, and affection of a stern and aloof teacher and never once realize that one is attempting to compensate for the frustration and lack of love from a stern and aloof parent. To really break through these "hang ups" one must focus attention, not on the sensation of breath at the nostrils, but instead focus on the agonizing feelings of inadequacy, mediocrity, loneliness, or rejection in one's heart.

When asked "What have you gained from meditation?" the correct answer should be ṅothing." For meditation is not for acquiring but for giving up—a full and complete giving up

of the self. Too often people put in a half-hour each day at meditation in the same way that they put in a half-hour studying French. After so many months or years one has a new attribute, a new skill to add to one's already impressive repertoire of virtues, achievements, talents, and abilities. "I can speak French, play the piano, ski, type sixty words a minute, and meditate as well." Such a person is either compensating for strong feelings of inadequacy or else is badly afflicted with narcissism.

Another way in which meditation becomes misdirected, as a result of the very motives which determined it, is the quest for new sensations or experiences, i.e., *lobha.* Many seek from meditation the very same thing they seek from drugs —i.e., an overwhelming ego-immersing experience of sensations, perceptions, colors, emotions, and "transcendental states beyond words."

It is not meant to belittle such experiences and say that they have no significance or no value. But as with taking LSD or seeing a good motion picture, they quickly pass into memories. And once past, in a very short time one's old mood changes, petty jealousies, conceits, and irritations are back just as strong and as frequent as ever. If there has been no true and lasting personality change, then Buddhist meditation has fallen short of its intended goal.

At the opposite extreme are persons whose approaches to Buddhism are excessively dogmatic, literal, orthodox, and moralistic. They strongly resist a pragmatic, eclectic

approach to meditation and are hyper-concerned with the nuances and fine points of Buddhist tradition and decorum. From these sources one repeatedly hears such statements as, "To progress at meditation there must be strict moral discipline," or "You cannot expect fast results but must work for years." Now there is truth in both these statements. But in this context they are really symptoms of extreme rigidity and dogmatism, which in principle is no different than the dogmatism of many Christian missionaries or other persons doggedly committed to a given institution. One's commitment to the tradition and to the letter of the teaching is so strong that one is incapable of truly practicing that very same teaching which advises one to have no prejudices and to see truth as universal and independent of any institution. I feel that this unfortunate phenomenon accounts for several instances of very diligent and dedicated meditation practitioners who, despite years of intensive practice, reveal little more than chronic, mild depression mixed with plodding determination.

The theme of guilt and self-punishment is one factor (though not the only one) which tends to perpetuate the phenomenon of diligent striving with minimal results. It usually begins with one taking a highly idealistic, moralistic, and sometimes devotional approach to Dhamma. One tries for one-pointed concentration and complete suppression of mental defilements. One fails and tries again; fails and tries again. Blaming oneself for one's failure one comes to feel guilty and tries even harder, again failing.

With this the austerity of one's practice comes to take on a self-punitive nature. Angry with oneself, one becomes more severe with oneself.

For those who have some insight into their dilemma, there may be the added problem of feeling guilty about feeling guilty or becoming irritated that one gets irritated. But insight is also the first step to resolution. The second step is to back off and relax a bit. As the Buddha said, the guitar string once too slack has now been wound too tight, and to produce harmony the tension must be relieved. For idealistic, moralistic personalities, letting go and relaxing are the very things that intensify one's guilt. Yet in principle this is much like what the Buddha did when he renounced austere asceticism and took up the middle way. The practitioner must stand back and re-appraise his whole involvement in Buddhism and examine the matter fully without fearing the consequences of his decision.

In evaluating progress at meditation it is important to distinguish between true Buddhist attainment and adaptation. Any human being (or for that matter almost any biological organism) when placed in a new situation goes through the process of adjusting, adapting, and growing accustomed. This is true of human life in general, and it is true of a man who takes the robes of a Buddhist monk. With the passage of time he grows to accept his role, to acclimatize, and to learn to "work the system"; he may become contented and happy by virtue of duration and age alone.

This process of adaptation is especially relevant in the case of intensive meditation practice where one may spend weeks or months confined to a small room, leaving that room only for brief meetings and instructions from the meditation master. In such situations the practitioner may get extreme feelings of peace and happiness, of clarity and alertness of mind such as never before seen, and also he may glimpse what appear to be transcendental states. (However, moments of depression, agitation, sobbing, etc., are also common, depending on the person.) Many who have completed such training have come away greatly impressed and highly praising this technique. However, it appears that all of these impressive subjective experiences vanish as soon as one comes out of cloistered isolation, and then, much like a drug experience, they remain only as memories. Moreover, many people who have "finished the course" appear to manifest the same selfishness and general human shortcomings as found in human beings picked at random. In addition, there is a hazard in that some "graduates" have revealed extreme pride relative to their attainment.

From this it should not be assumed that there is nothing to be gained from such intensive training. On the contrary, I have frequently suggested it to persons seeking competent meditation instruction. However, I do feel that the empirical evidence shows that for many if not most people this technique alone is insufficient. And the very facts of the Eightfold Path and the Buddhist scriptures in general

support this thesis. Thus it would be wise to resolve one's mundane problems of social adjustment and other emotional conflicts before attempting more specialized practices.

Quite often a cloister which protects one from all forms of insults, humiliation, irritation, and anxiety may induce a false sense of attainment and lull one into complacency. We can confront and abolish our mental defilements only when they are actively alive in our minds. We cannot do this when they are but hazy memories or intellectually created notions. Consequently many practitioners have found that their progress is enhanced by having true life situations of social interaction and frustration. On the other hand, an excessive exposure to such interactions and frustrations may exceed one's ability for alert mindfulness, and one thereby insidiously becomes involved with the quarrels and fascinations that breed hatred and sorrow. When living in a cloister where no problems arise, one's defensive reactions and dispositions may lie dormant and thus remain hidden. But in ordinary lay life, temptations, sensations, and problems arise so fast that much of the daily routine is little more than a repeating pattern of perceive, react and solve; perceive, react and solve; perceive, react and solve; and so on.

Thus for many practitioners the solution lies in a middle way between these extremes: that is, a situation in which one still has a moderate exposure to chores, annoyances, and social interactions, but this is interspersed with

intervals of quietude and meditation. Such intervals may be a duration of hours or a duration of weeks depending on individual needs and circumstances. Thus by maintaining an optimal amount of involvement with social and sensory arousal, such a one does more than just perceive, react and solve. With mindfulness he is able to catch the perception and reaction as it arises. He observes it, scrutinizes it, and evaluates it. In so doing, it may then be modified, abandoned or developed as seen fit. He acts with mindfulness instead of on habit or reflex, and thus new responses and solutions may be learned. If (as some psychologists have claimed) one's personality is the sum total of one's perceptions, responses and reactions, then in this way the growth and development of the personality is possible.

The optimum proportion of time that one should spend in isolated meditation as contrasted with the time spent in more mundane pursuits will vary among different individuals. It will also vary according to the method of practice and with different times and stages of development for a given individual.

I state these above conclusions not only from a theoretical position and not just because they seem to be revealed in the life pattern of the Buddha and his disciples as portrayed in the suttas. My own limited observations of persons who appear to have progressed at Buddhist practice also fits this conclusion.

It is against such a background of observations and considerations that I have reviewed my own earlier writing on meditation. In essence these words still appear to be sound, and there are no statements that I would see fit to repudiate. However, I feel one point needs to be more strongly emphasized, and that is that a regular daily practice of meditation alone will not be likely to show results unless one is willing to thoroughly scrutinize his or her entire pattern of living and be prepared to revise or abandon this lifestyle if so indicated. In the same way one who undertakes Buddhist training as either a monk or layman would do well not to set a time limit and should not commit himself too strongly to future plans (such as "I will finish my university training" or "I will return to my homeland to teach the Dhamma"). For such a one has already decided beforehand just what he will become and thereby has limited the amount of change that he will allow himself to make.

Also (and partly as a result of Buddhaghosa's writings, i.e., the *Visuddhimagga*) I think I have emphasized too strongly the amount of breathing and other bodily-directed concentrations called for in beginning practice (pp. 16ff.). I say this with some hesitation because it has become popular in some circles to completely disown concentration as important to Buddhist practice, and I do not agree with this view. But if one focuses exclusively on breathing, walking, or whatever to the point of blocking all thoughts and emotions, one is thereby turning his attention away from

the very mental defilements and neurotic conflicts that must be confronted in order to be overcome. Thus it is probably significant that in the Noble Eightfold Path right concentration follows after right mindfulness.

One meets a fair number of people who have (or at least claim to have) made considerable attainment at one-pointed concentration. Yet, with a few notable exceptions, they appear to be just as prone to selfishness and petty jealousies as any ordinary persons whom one might meet at random. Some in fact have shown themselves to be very unhappy, lonely, and/or insecure. On the other hand, persons who have made only slight progress at sustained concentration have, nevertheless, in the course of Buddhist practice, made considerable progress at diminishing conceit, resentment, depression, and selfishness. (However, the one person in my experience who, after months of close observation, appears to have made the greatest progress towards removing mental defilements of all sorts, is also the only person I know who appears capable of entering the third jhāna at will.)

The same is true of the labelling technique (pp. 20–21) which is especially common in some forms of Burmese intensive training. With this technique one, who in meditation, finds himself daydreaming will simply note this and label it "imagining, imagining" or "fantasy, fantasy" and then return to awareness of breathing, body sensation, or whatever. However, daydreams and fantasies are most often an expression of our desires and emotional conflicts. If

one examines the daydream in the frame of mind: “What does it express?” “What desire is it attempting to satisfy?” “What feeling does it carry?” then one can gain insight into his emotional needs and at the same time confront those same mental taints which meditation is supposed to overcome. The labelling technique is, of course, highly useful in dispensing with physical distractions such as itches, pains, and noises; and with certain types of moods (e.g., boredom) and certain kinds of memories. But it must be used judiciously; for if used exclusively it can retard progress.

A general rule of practice which many practitioners have used to advantage is as follows: One starts practice by attempting to quiet and concentrate the mind. But after some minutes of finding that the mind repeatedly wanders from its intended object, the practitioner then stands back as it were and asks: “Just what is my present state of mind at this instant?” “What is it that makes my attention wander from its intended object?” This then is analyzed and confronted. In principle this is much like another useful technique which is: One does not choose any given meditation subject but instead simply sits and takes note: “What is my mental state now? What gross feelings? What subtle feelings? What memories and expectations? What intentions or desires?” In actual practice this is done not in the form of verbal thoughts, as expressed in the preceding sentences, but rather as a state of watchful observation with few if any word thoughts present. Quite often at such times

one finds a subtle mental defilement which must be examined and discarded. That is the idea: “Now I am meditating and want to have something to show for it. I want something to happen.” Or it may be: “I want to confront and overcome my anger, but now that I’m looking for it, it seems to have gone,” and with this arises a feeling of frustration. Herein one has set a goal and been thwarted. Thus the desiring of this specific goal and its resultant frustration is the very state of mind that must be dealt with. Successful meditation requires catching the immediate present.

Finally a note about the attainments in meditation: unless one is very advanced, one does not expect or aspire to any new or unusual experience such as are known in ordinary life. Instead the attainments are negative ones and thus only seen in retrospect. For example, one suddenly reflects: “A year ago I was chronically depressed, unhappy, irritable, defensive. That rarely happens now. Such and such a thing used to upset me greatly. Now it happens and I hardly notice.”

It may be stating the case too strongly to say that in meditation one seeks to gain nothing. For there is an increase in happiness and peace of mind. But when asked, “What have you gained from meditation?” the answer would be: “It is not what I have gained that is important but rather what I have diminished, namely, greed, hatred, and delusion.”>

Notes

1. *Buddhism*, by Richard A. Gard. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1961, pp. 207–8.
2. *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, by Nyanaponika Thera. London: Rider & Co. 1962, p. 82.
3. *An Experiment in Mindfulness*, by E.H. Shattock. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1960, pp.17, 19.
4. Saṃyutta Nikāya, 47:21.
5. *Visuddhimagga*, IV, 40–41. Translation by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli. Colombo: R. Semage, 1956.
6. *An Experiment in Mindfulness*, p. 8.
7. *Visuddhimagga*, III, 62–65, 121.
8. *Ibid.*, IV, 120.
9. Saṃyutta Nikāya, 46:53.
10. *Buddhism as a Way of Life*, by Douglas M. Burns. San Carlos, California: Neo-Dhamma, 1964.
11. *The Foundations of Mindfulness.* Translation by Nyanasatta Thera. BPS Wheel No. 19.
12. Saṃyutta Nikāya, 47:48.

13. *Ibid.*, 47:50.
14. *Foundations of Mindfulness*, p. 3.
15. *Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, p. 98.
16. *Visuddhimagga*, VIII, 200.
17. *Ibid.*, VIII, 202.
18. *Ibid.*, VIII, 190.
19. *Ibid.*, VIII, 195.
20. *Ibid.*, VIII, 206–7.
21. *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, pp. 85–86.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
23. *An Experiment in Mindfulness*, pp. 52–55.
24. Saṃyutta Nikāya, 46:53.
25. Majjhima Nikāya, 119.
26. *Visuddhimagga*, XI, 30.
27. *Ibid.*, XI, 26.
28. Saṃyutta Nikāya, 47:10.
29. *Visuddhimagga*, VI.
30. *Ibid.*, IX.
31. *Buddhism in a Nutshell*, by Nārada Thera. Bambalapitiya, Ceylon: Asoka Dharmadutha Saṅgamāya, 1959, pp. 67–69
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

33. *Visuddhimagga,* VII, 65.

34. *Aṅguttara Nikāya,* VI, 10.

35. *An Experiment in Mindfulness.*

36. *Majjhima Nikāya,* 123.

37. Saṃyutta Nikāya, 35:152. The reader will note that this passage also demonstrates the highly experiential aspect of Buddhist epistemology.

38. *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation,* pp. 68–70.

39. Saṃyutta Nikāya, 47:49.

40. *Ibid.,* 36:3.

41. *Ibid.,* 22:96.

42. *Ibid.,* 12:61.

43. *The Removal of Distracting Thoughts.* Translation by Soma Thera. BPS Wheel No. 21.

44. *The Word of the Buddha,* by Nyanatiloka Mahāthera. Kandy: BPS, p. 79.

45. *Ibid.,* pp. 80–81.

46. *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation,* p. 111.

47. *Visuddhimagga,* III, 107.

48. *Psychical Research Today,* by D.J. West. Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1962.

49. *The Word of the Buddha,* pp. 67–68.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

51. *Visuddhimagga,* XII, 11.

52. *Dīgha Nikāya,* No. 11, Kevaḍḍha Sutta.

53. *Visuddhimagga,* III, 56.

54. *Ibid.*, IV, 30.

55. *Concentration and Meditation,* by Swami Sivananda. Himalayas, India: Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy, 1959, p. 314.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

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63. *Ibid.*

64. *Archives of General Psychiatry,* Vol. 3. "Therapeutic Changes in Psychiatric Patients Following Partial Sensory Deprivation," by R. Gibby, H. Adams, and R. Carrera. July, 1960, pp. 57/33–66/42.

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67. *Folia Psychiatrica et Neurologica Japonica,* Vol. 20, No. 4. "An Electroencephalographic Study of the Zen Meditation (Zazen)," by Akira Kasamatsu and Tomio Hirai. December, 1966, pp. 315–36.

68. Saṃyutta Nikāya, 47:19

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